

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER
AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 1472

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to have my name removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 1472.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from West Virginia?

There was no objection.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER
AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 2022

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to have my name removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 2022.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2691, and that I may include tabular and extraneous material.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Carolina?

There was no objection.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 319 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 2691.

□ 1725

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 2691) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes, with Mr. LATOURETTE in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. TAYLOR) and the gentleman from Washington (Mr. DICKS) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. TAYLOR).

Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, today we bring before the House for fiscal year 2004 appropriations a bill for the Department of the Interior and related agencies. This is a good bill that balances many competing needs and stays within the 302(b) allocations for budget authority.

Mr. Chairman, this bill is fiscally responsible, providing about \$100 million more than the budget request but nearly \$200 million less than the fiscal year 2003 level. The bill takes care of our public lands, the national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, and lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. It has been increased not as much as some would like; and I pledge that in conference, we will try to increase that as much as possible.

The bill focuses on conservation initiatives, including operation and maintenance of Federal lands, stateside grants for land preservation and recreation, State wildlife grants, habitat improvements on both public and private lands, eradication of invasive species, and protection of endangered species.

We hear arguments that we are not doing enough for the conservation program in this bill. I disagree. There is nearly \$1 billion in the bill for programs in the conservation spending category. But more to the point, there are a great number of critically important conservation programs in this bill that have never been included in the conservation spending category but are equally important.

□ 1730

We provide increases of \$73 million for national parks, \$30 million for national wildlife refuges, and \$93 million for wildlife restoration and forest health. I would argue that most of the funding in this bill is for conservation activities.

Some Members will argue that we need to buy more Federal lands. What we really need is to do a better job of taking care of lands we have and this bill does that.

Fire fighting needs are addressed in this bill. In addition to providing the necessary funding for suppressing wildfires, we continue support for the National Fire Plan with the investment of \$2.5 billion. We support preparedness activities so that we have the people and equipment in place to handle wildfires. We provide funding increases for hazardous fuels reduction, State fire assistance, and forest health programs. I am proud of the balance we

have achieved in these critical programs that are important to all Americans.

The bill ensures that energy research programs are adequately funded and that we maintain a proper mix between research on improvements to existing technologies and longer-term higher-risk research on new technologies. We need to keep all of our options open and not fall into the trap of picking winners and losers.

When it comes to energy research, ultimately the consumer and not the government will determine what energy technologies will be successful in the marketplace.

The bill provides for the continued construction of critically needed schools and hospitals for the American Indians and Alaskan Natives. It is included in a resolution to the contentious litigation between the United States and the American Indians dealing with the individual Indian trust monies. This bill provides prompt, fair, and reasonable resolution of those long-standing claims. This lawsuit has been diverting scarce resources away from critical programs that benefit the Indian people. We need to stop spending hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions, on litigation support and redirect those funds to Indian education, health, wildlife, law enforcement and other important Indian programs.

My good friend, the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO), chairman of the Committee on Resources, will move to strike this provision on jurisdictional grounds. He has committed to resolving this conflict through the authorizing process. Mr. Chairman, if we do not do this, we will literally be spending perhaps \$2.4 billion in continuous accounting measures that will do nothing to solve this problem. It will be taken away from Indian health and education.

Finally, the bill takes care of our cultural agencies and provides the funding needed to ensure that the Smithsonian Institution maintains its responsibility for providing quality visitor services and world-renowned research. It provides the administration's request for the National Gallery of Art and for the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2004 is a bill that I believe strikes an appropriate balance among competing funding needs, and I ask for support for the bill.